

Biblical Counsel on Guidance

Acts 16:6-10

By Phillip G. Kayser, 2-3-2008

Intro:

I don't know if you have noticed, but most fortune cookies I have opened in a Chinese restaurant tell you what you want to hear or what is so obvious that it is ridiculous. There was one fortune cookie that said, "You will be hungry again in an hour." Well, it may not be true for some people, but it was definitely true for me. Back in those days I was always hungry. But if I ever ran a Chinese restaurant, I thought it would be fun to have this message: "Stop trying to find your fortune in a cookie and go get a job." And I am just about as cynical of some of the discussions on guidance that our out there. A lot of so-called guidance is no different from seeking guidance in a fortune cookie, going to a gypsy to read a crystal ball, or basing your decisions on hunches and feelings. Guidance *is* a part of the Christian life. I'm not denying that. But it's absolutely imperative that we not fall for counterfeits. And I love this passage because it helps to avoid some of the counterfeits that plague the Christian church. This will not be a complete sermon on guidance. I have a booklet that deals with that.

I. What Paul's Guidance Was Not

A. *Not a substitute for Scripture*

But the first thing I want you to notice is that God's guidance was not a substitute for Scripture in the life of Paul. Verse 6 says that they were going on a missions trip to Galatia and God's guidance diverts them. Why were they going to Galatia? It was in fulfillment of the Great Commission. We don't need guidance in order to obey the Scripture. The moment the Scripture calls you to do something, you are under obligation to try to perform it. Paul was already obeying the Bible when this guidance came.

And there are four ways that people have erred in this area of Scripture. First, I know people who contradict the Bible through their supposed guidance. I talked with a pastor who was divorcing his wife and was trying to get a woman to divorce her husband so that they could get married. When I confronted him about that being sin, he said, "God has given me guidance to do this." I told him that it must be the devil giving him guidance because God does not contradict Himself, and Jesus made it clear

that He could not divorce His wife. After arguing for a while he admitted that my exegesis was correct. But he said, “It may not be God’s perfect will, but it is still His will. God has guided me.” But that is nonsense. Guidance is never a substitute for the Bible. And nowhere in the book of Acts do you find any guidance in Paul’s life that contradicted the Bible.

But the flip side is just as disobedient. I have talked to members of my churches about a sin that they were living in (and it was clearly labeled a sin – in one case it was marrying an unbeliever), and the response was, “The Holy Spirit has not convicted me of that.” And I’ve told them, “Well, get convicted. The Spirit has spoken to you clearly in His Word right here.” Even on the other situations, they didn’t question what the Scripture said. They just felt that since the Spirit hadn’t convicted them yet, they didn’t have to do it. Well, that is just as ridiculous. Lack of conviction or lack of guidance is not a substitute for Scripture. It is a satanic counterfeit. There is a bumper sticker that says, “If I’m not headed west, stop me and turn me around.” And we could just as well say that of guidance. If we are not headed in the direction that the Scripture has given, stop us and turn us around. I don’t care what dreams and visions you have had, if they are taking you east and away from Scripture, it is not of God. True guidance helps us on the path of holiness and it helps us on the path of Scripture. It is never a substitute for Scripture. I hope this is a refrain that will ring in your ears.

Another way of violating this principle is that some people will become passive because they haven’t heard from God. They will stop moving and spend days in prayer wondering if they should take the job promotion. I knew one person in Bible School who sought God’s guidance on what color socks to wear, what to eat, etc. And he spent so much time seeking God’s guidance on things that were obvious that he was neglecting clearly stated duties. If the subject of guidance is making you passive, there is something very wrong. Paul was not passive in this book. He is already moving and implementing the Scripture before he gets his three forms of guidance. God is steering a moving ship.

A fourth way this principle is violated is that some people fail to study the guidance God has already given in His Word. Proverbs says we need to search the Scriptures for wisdom as if we were digging for silver. Why would God give you an abundance of guidance when you aren’t mining the Word of God? Think of it this way: if you had \$20,000 to invest, to whom would you entrust your money in order to make it grow? Would you entrust it to a poor person who has never invested anything, or to a wealthy Wall Street investor? Well, obviously the best choice would be best to invest your

money with the wealthy man who has had a lot of experience in wisely investing. Well, that's God's attitude with us. Listen to Mark 4:25. Jesus says, **For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.** That may not seem fair for God to give *more* to a person who already has lots of resources and to take away from the one who has so little. But this is God's principle of kingdom investment. If you take seriously the richness of God's Word and make it grow in your life, God will invest you with more and more insight and wisdom. But if you are lazy, don't expect Him to give you anything. Failing to study the Bible is a sure way to miss out on the most fantastic guidance you will ever get.

Elizabeth Elliott told¹ of the two back packers who stopped by to see her when she was in the rain forest by the Andes Mountains. They didn't ask for advice. All they asked her to do was to teach them a few phrases to converse with the Indians. She thought that was a little strange since these guys had no knowledge of the area. And she wrote that this is how we frequently are with God. We go out into the world only equipped with a few phrases from the Bible and we think we will do OK. We're confident. But that is a false confidence. Before Paul went out on missions, he spent three solid years soaking in the Word of God; learning everything that he could. And of course he had a lifetime of memorizing the Bible before that. His worldview carried him through even when there was no other guidance.

George Mueller said, "I will seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them." That's point A.

B. Not a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture (v. 6, 8,9; 2 Pet 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Point B is similar. Guidance must never become a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. Peter tells us that the Scriptures give to us "**all things that pertain to life and godliness.**" 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that they are sufficient to make the man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Were the Scriptures sufficient to give Paul a destination, a message, a method and a goal? Yes, they were. What was being forbidden in

¹ In *A Slow and Certain Light*.

verses 6,7 and 8? Something that was already in the Word. What was being asked in verse 9? Something that was already in the Bible.

The Scriptures gave Paul freedom to go to whatever country he decided to go to. But, there were far too many countries for Paul to reach on his own. Guidance narrowed Paul's focus within the Scripture but was not a denial of its sufficiency. So think of guidance as a narrowing of the Scriptural options, not going beyond them.

For example, we don't look for new laws that aren't in the Bible, like natural law theorists do. You can't add any ethics to the Bible. We don't look for new elements of a worldview. We have everything we need in the Bible. We don't look for new axioms of education. The Bible is sufficient. But within that sufficient word Paul had permission to go to Jews or Gentiles. God's call narrowed his focus to do church planting outside of Israel. Outside of Israel Paul still had Scriptural freedom to go to any country he wanted, but guidance kept him from spinning his wheels where God's Spirit had not yet prepared the soil of human hearts. The Spirit in verse 9 is leading Paul to minister in the lives of people who have been made ready. So it is no way a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture.

C. *Not a substitute for using your head and planning (vv. 6,7,8,10; Rom. 1:13)*

A third thing that we need to realize is that guidance is not a substitute for using our heads or planning. Paul planned to go to Asia in verse 6, but the Spirit changed his plans. He then planned to go to Mysia in verse 7 and the Spirit again changed His plans. He planned to go to Troas in verse 8, and the Spirit gave him the Macedonian call of verse 9. But all the way through he was planning, and the Spirit didn't stop him from planning. In fact, we will see shortly that God expects us to plan. But I want you to also notice the words of verse 10. **Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.** Concluding... Paul was using his head. He was making a deduction to the best of his ability.

Why is this important? Because it will spare you from legalism. It will spare you from stupid mistakes. It will spare you from over generalizing your guidance. And it will spare you from blindly submitting to the guidance of others. I know of a situation where a missionary told a woman that God had revealed to him that she was to marry him. She didn't even know him very well, yet she blindly submitted. Another woman had a better response when a young man tried that trick on her. She said something like, "I will seriously consider what you said, but I expect that God will give me the

same guidance if this is true.” They did not end up getting married. And their lives were *not* a disaster. She was using her head. We are going to be seeing that guidance is not necessarily a constant occurrence. So what do you do in between? If we aren’t using our heads and planning, we aren’t going to get anywhere. In Romans 1:13 Paul tells the Romans, **Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now)...** The fact that his plans were hindered many times did not keep Paul from planning. Purpose, planning and use of sanctified “horse sense” are a must for the Christian. Kent Crockett said,

Imagine going on an ocean cruise to an island. After you have been out on the ocean for a week, you say to the captain, "It sure seems like we should have arrived by now. When do we plan to arrive?" The captain answers, "Plans? I don't make any plans. I just trust God to guide the boat through the wind and waves to the right destination." That sounds ridiculous, but many people drift through life in the same way. They make no plans, yet believe they will reach their destination on time. If we fail to plan, we plan to fail. Making plans will cause us to act rather than react. (Kent Crockett, *The 911 Handbook*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003, 139)

That’s good advice. Any guidance that neglects planning and using your head should be discarded as counterfeit. Certainly God can and will blue-pencil and change our plans, but don’t expect Him to bail you out if you have failed to plan.

D. Not a guarantee of immediate success (vv. 11-15), lack of trouble (vv. 16-24) or something great (vv. 14,25-34).

Next, guidance is not a guarantee of immediate success, lack of trouble or even that you will achieve something great and spectacular. That’s the way fortune cookies read, and it’s the way many so-called prophecies nowadays read. They are just designed to make people feel good about themselves. But God’s guidance for Paul often leads to disaster from a human perspective. In verses 11-15 we don’t see huge success from the extra expense that Paul has had. It would have been costly in time and expense to make those changes. And what does he get for it in Philippi? Initially, there was only one family converted, and she was a single mom. Then in verses 16-24 Paul and Silas end up in Jail (having been beaten) and in great pain. But instead of doubting God’s guidance, they are giving praises to God. They know that even this is working together for their good and His glory. The Lord sometimes gives clear guidance to us of somewhere that we ought

to go, and we begin to second guess ourselves because things don't turn out the way that we had hoped. But there is more. In verses 25-34 we see Paul and his team being forced to leave the city. That's remarkable. He has spent three months traveling here, and he only converts two families before he has to leave?! If you have a Pollyanna view of life then you are going to be skeptical of guidance that leads you into trouble. You will question Scripture when doing what it says makes trouble. You will question God's leading when following it is uncomfortable. So this passage is here to say that any view of guidance that sees it as always leading to success, comfort and greatness is a counterfeit view of guidance. God's guidance is for *His* glory and we are but servants in His kingdom. Self-serving and self-motivated leaders will often use you through their supposed guidance, and you need to test it against the Scripture and ask for God's confirmation. God's guidance is not for our comfort. It's for our *good*, but it's not for our comfort or greatness.

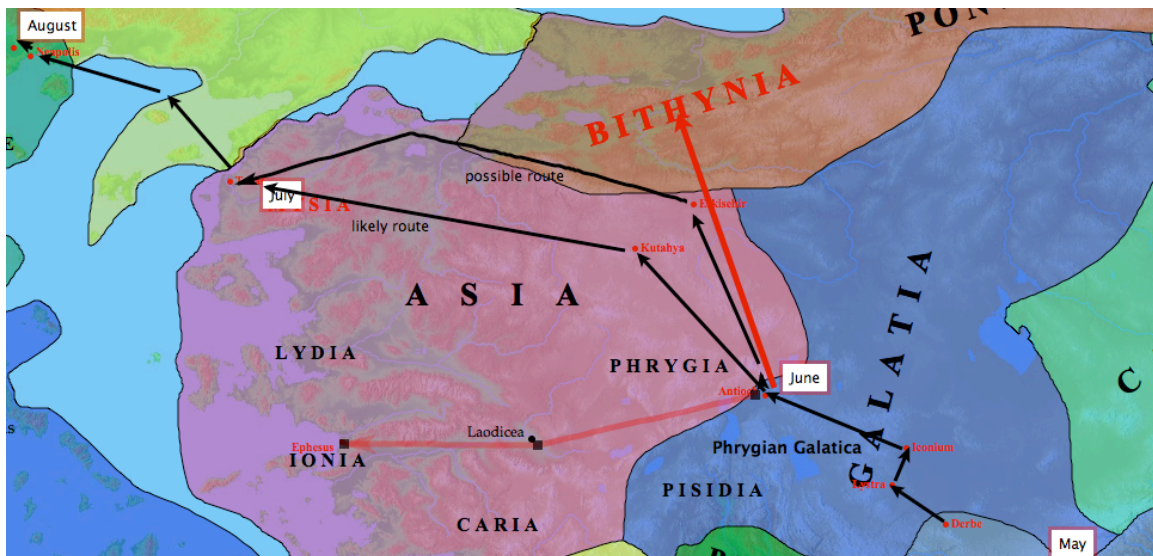
E. Remarkable guidance such as is mentioned in verses 6,7 and 9 is not constant

Another misconception about guidance is thinking that remarkable guidance is a constant thing throughout life. Now obviously the *Bible's* guidance is constant and sufficient. But the kinds of specific direction that is given in this passage is not. If it was, Paul wouldn't have been attempting to preach in Asia in verse 6, and he wouldn't have headed north to Bithynia in verse 7, and he wouldn't have headed to Troas in verse 8. Based on verse 6, Paul knows that he needs to be heading away from Asia, but he doesn't know exactly where he will end up. He takes a guess as to a good place to plant a church, and heads north to Bithynia in verse 7. And God lets him travel for quite a while before He lets Paul know that he can't go into Bithynia. (We will be seeing in a moment that there was a good reason for that. Paul needed to travel further north to get a good road west. So just lets him assume Bithynia so that he will go further north.) Apparently the field there was not yet ready for Paul to plant seed. The implication of verses 6-10 is that this kind of specific guidance was even rare for Paul. If this is true, it has profound ramifications for the whole guidance debate.

Let's do a little chronology here. According to the detailed chronology worked out by Harold Hoehner,² it took five months from chapter 15:35 to chapter 16:12, when Paul arrives in Philippi, Macedonia. That's where he is headed. Here's the sequence if you want to write the

² Harold Hoehner, "A Chronological Table of the Apostolic Age," April 1972.

months in your margin. And you *may indeed* want to write this because you won't easily find this information in commentaries. It's specialized papers that delve into this stuff. Chapter 15:36 is April of 50 AD. This is when they depart from Antioch. Verse 41 of the same chapter would be later in April. Chapter 16:1 is May when they arrive in Derbe. They are visiting the churches planted in the previous trip all through the month of May. Some of this is guesswork, but it is very sanctified guesswork. We know what the bookends are; we know exactly how far they have to travel. We know how good the roads were. We know that Paul is only traveling and not preaching in the Roman province of Asia after verse 6. So when you add up the time that it takes to travel, and what he was doing, most of this is quite realistic scheduling. I've put a map into your outlines to give some of the dates and two possible land routes that he took. The arrows that are further south from Bithynia are the more likely, and they are the ones that are most frequently put into the Bible maps. But FF Bruce says that either route was possible given the hints in the Greek.



Let me start reading in verse 6 and we will insert dates as we go. **Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia** – Notice the order of Phrygia before Galatia even though they are traveling from east to West. Liberals have on occasion scoffed at this, thinking that the writer doesn't know his geography. On your map you will see a Phrygia that is in the province of Asia, but that wouldn't make sense here because Phrygia is placed before Galatia. What happened is that Phrygia got divided and part of it was included in the Roman province of Galatia. So literally this reads "Phrygia Galatica region." Some liberals have questioned whether Luke is

mixed up here, but archeology has found 31 examples of this Greek phrase being used to describe exactly the region where Paul previously planted churches. And it includes Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. So FF Bruce paraphrases it, “The Phrygian territory incorporated in the province of Galatia.”³ Hoehner’s chronology has Paul reaching Iconium somewhere between the last of May to the middle of June, and then reaching Pisidian Antioch somewhere between the middle of June and the first of July. So you can put June down beside verse 6. That is fairly accurate even though there is a span of time.

Continuing in verse 6: **they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.** Apparently they were planning to travel slightly south and west to Ephesus (that’s the southwesterly thick arrow), but God diverts them. Paul will end up in Ephesus much later, but God is not ready for him to go there yet. Verse 7: **After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia...** There are two translation possibilities here. The way the NKJV has it, Paul sought to go north after he has almost crossed Asia. But Ramsay and FF Bruce point out that the literal Greek is talking about coordinates, and that Paul has been heading north until he is across from Mysia on the Roman trade routes. So when he goes up high enough to get onto the road that takes him to Mysia, God gives him further directions. But either way, it doesn’t affect our conclusion. Bithynia would have been north. It was a logical guess. “If we aren’t supposed to preach in Asia, perhaps we are supposed to go north.” But now that they are far enough north, God has them go west until they reach Troas. Are you thoroughly confused? Just look at the map and you will see the main points.

Verse 8 – **So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.** They arrive in Troas some time in July. They pick up Luke in Troas (see the “we” in verse 10) and in verse 10 they leave for Macedonia. In the margin beside verse 12 you can put down August. So just to summarize, let me repeat the dates I have in the margin of my Bible. Chapter 15:41 is April. Chapter 16:1 is May. Verse 6 is June. Verse 8 is July. Verse 12 is August.

I bring all of that up because I think it is important for understanding that Paul’s subjective guidance was not constant. He gets guidance in the beginning of June to not preach in Asia. They start traveling what seems like a good route, and get another check in their spirit forbidding them to keep going that direction in late June or early July. Then in Troas they get this vision that finally clears up exactly what their final destination should be. Three indicators in two months is not exactly the kind of guidance that many

³ FF Bruce, *NICNT The Book of Acts*, p. 306.

charismatics insist we must constantly be receiving. It's a wonderful guidance, but it is obvious from the text that it was not constant.

F. *Rarely all that we would like*

And you can also deduce point F from all that we have said. God's guidance is rarely all that we would like. There are lots of times that I have wished that I had the guidance I have gotten overseas for *every* situation I face. Paul might have wished that God had told him the whole nine yards of where he was going in verse 6. But God made Paul use sanctified wisdom, and it all worked out beautifully as we will be seeing shortly, because God even guides through those non-spectacular means.

G. *Not an excuse for inaction*

Point G can also be logically deduced from what we have seen. Lack of constant guidance is not an excuse for inaction. The Bible calls us to action, and we are free to go unless more specific applications are given. There is never an excuse for passivity. If Paul had followed the advice that I have gotten from many people, he would have spent the next two weeks after verse 6 in prayer and fasting, trying to discern the Lord's will. He didn't do so. He knows he can't preach in Asia: fine, he tries to go preach elsewhere. And later God directs him *away* from that elsewhere: fine, he makes the only other logical choice that is available. But Paul has total freedom to be active. The point is that guidance is not the basis for action; the word of God is. Guidance fine-tunes our action. One analogy that you could use is that you can only steer a moving ship. And the rudder doesn't have to be very big to steer it. The Scriptures and God's grace give us everything we need to get moving. And it is almost always only as we are moving in obedience to His will that God's further guidance comes to play. So if you aren't receiving guidance, get moving. Start obeying the Bible. God doesn't have patience with those who don't. He steers a moving ship.

II. What Paul's guidance was

- A. ***A combination of many factors that come to bear as Scripture is lived out: planning, checks and/or premonitions, visions, logic, providential circumstances, advice of others, and even persecution (16:6,7,9,10,15-16,18,22-24,26,35-37; 17:5-9,13-14,33; 18:9-11; etc)***

I think by weeding out what guidance is not, we have already been seeing to some degree what guidance is. But let's move on to Roman numeral II and see that God's guidance is varied. God uses many things to guide His people. In verses 6 and 7 we have a couple of different ways in which God puts an understanding into their minds that they ought not to pursue a goal. We aren't told exactly how God did it. It may have been by way of words, a premonition, a check in the spirit or some other way, but frequently when we are in danger, God gives us a strong sense that we ought not to pursue a given goal. I have had this experience a number of times, where quick action in response to a sense that the police were coming in one country enabled us to leave just before they got there. In verse 9 he got a vision. I've only had something analogous to this three times in my life, but each time it has accurately helped me. In one vision at night I actually had two visions back to back that made me certain that authorities would come at noon the next day. So we continued to teach till 11 am and then left.

But notice that in verse 10 all the team members are involved in confirming that what Paul has heard is correct. Never treat any of this stuff as being infallible. Only the Bible is infallible. So I want you to notice that only Paul had the vision, but it says **we [plural] sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.** They were all involved in the concluding. They had to come to their own conclusion. That's what I did with this vision. I told the team members what I had experienced and asked them what they thought. And lo and behold, two others had had exactly the same thing happen to them that night. We didn't treat it as infallible, but God used it to make the team members willing to leave. And it was a good thing.

There were other very ordinary means of guidance in Paul's life. In verse 15 Lydia begs them to stay at her house. They had a need, God touched her heart to respond to the need, and verse 15 says, **So she persuaded us.** That's pretty ordinary, but God uses the invitations and opportunities of other people. That is a kind of guidance – an opportunity opening at just the right time.

In verse 18 we see that Paul's ministry response to a girl who was annoying him, landed him in jail. And sometimes the natural repercussions of our ministry actions are used by God to force us into ministries we wouldn't otherwise have chosen. I doubt Paul would deliberately get himself into jail. But how otherwise would the Philippian jailor and his household get converted? His imprisonment was God's guidance. Obviously God wants him in that jail or he wouldn't be there.

Likewise, the earthquake presents an opportunity that might not otherwise have been there. And Paul seizes the opportunity afforded by the jailors terror. The jailor's terror also opens up opportunities to talk to the magistrates that would not have been present, and Paul feels strongly that he shouldn't just leave quietly.

Chapter 17 shows how God uses persecution to direct Paul out of one city and into another that has just been perfectly prepared by the Lord. So God's sovereign orchestration of our lives is His guidance. God is in the details, so to speak. In that sense, God's guidance is constant. But the kind that people are frequently seeking (visions, premonitions, speech) is not.

One very ordinary kind of guidance can be seen in the end of chapter 17 where people mock Paul. Christ had said that when people persevere in mocking the truth, leave and go elsewhere. It's not remarkable, but when you keep finding the same rocky soil not bearing fruit, sanctified wisdom tells us to move on.

Then there is another night vision in chapter 18. There are other forms of guidance that you could trace in the book of Acts, but I think this should be sufficient to show that you can't put God in a box and expect that He has to guide you in a certain way. Open your eyes to all the variety of ways that God guides.

And I want to focus on what could have been a frustrating aspect of God's guidance. It doesn't always appear real clear, and it may have seemed like a waste of time for Paul to have to go across land to Troas when he could have sailed there from the coast of Pamphylia a lot more quickly and a lot more easily. In fact, he could have bypassed Troas altogether and sailed straight to Europe and on to Philippi. Was Paul's trip to Troas a wasted trip? That was a long overland trip to get to the coastland where they could take a ship to Europe. Why did God make this long delay? Well, we have a hint of God's reason in verse 10: **Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia...** This is the first time in Acts that the author of the book includes himself as a participant (using the word "we"). Apparently Paul discovers him in Troas and includes Luke on his team. From here on in he says "we" whenever Luke is on the team. If it hadn't

been for the delay, they may never have met Luke, and if it hadn't been for the trip to Troas, they for sure would not have met Luke. Luke proves to be an incredibly important part of God's plan. Not only does he write the Gospel of Luke, but Luke also becomes the biographer of Paul's travels. Paul may not have known why he had all these diversions until he meets Luke in Troas.

F.F. Bruce says simply, "If the narrator was Luke the physician of Col. 4:14, we may wonder if he was practicing his profession in Troas at the time, or waiting to be signed on as a ship's doctor; but we have no means of knowing. At any rate, he accompanied Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Macedonia, having taken part in the joint decision to go there in response to Paul's vision." (p. 308). And so this was providential guidance. Providence plays a big role in guiding Paul in chapters 16-18. Seemingly random events prove to be brilliantly guided moves on God's part. Even defeats and discouragements turn out to be important elements of Paul's guidance.

B. In the face of several Biblical options, God closes doors and opens doors and sovereignly takes us on detours.

Point B simply says that in the face of several Biblical options, God closes doors and opens doors and sovereignly takes us on detours. And we may be a little bit confused some of the time. But we shouldn't let that discourage us. God is indeed sovereign, and we can trust Him to guide us.

I think of Dr. Anderson's story⁴ of the young pilot who had his first experience at flying in the fog. He had never put his total trust in the cockpit instruments, and it was a bit unnerving. But he had been well trained, and so he did what he was supposed to. It was the landing that worried him the most. The traffic controller said, "I'm going to put you on a holding pattern." Well, that concerned the pilot a bit because he knew that he would be flying around with a bunch of other airplanes, so he said, "This is not a seasoned pro up here. I would appreciate any help you could give me." "You've got it," he heard back. And for the next 45 minutes the controller gently guided the pilot through the blinding fog, around obstacles, and avoiding other planes, and got him landed safely. That is the way it is with guidance. We have the rulebook for flying. It is the bible. We need to follow it faithfully. We need to memorize it. Even when our intuition tells us to ignore our instruments, we need to ignore our intuition and trust the Bible.

⁴ Dr. Anderson, Freedom in Christ and Harvest House Publishers
www.ficm.org

And God by His providence and occasional other means of direction will help us to go through the right open doors.

C. *Gradual – often step at a time and never diverting us from operating under the guidance of Scripture*

The last point is that guidance is gradual. Often it is a step at a time. And it never diverts us from operating under the guidance of the Scripture. I think the bottom line is that Scripture gives us everything that we need to live faithfully before the Lord. When we come to a fork in the road, it is wise to ask God to help us make the right decision. But if there is nothing in Scripture to limit your freedom, and there is nothing in your study of the circumstances that makes one choice better than another, and if His various forms of guidance are not closing the door, you have the liberty to do what you desire. I think we can read that much from this passage. Unfortunately, many people are so ignorant of what the Bible calls us to do in economics, politics, leadership training and other areas that we become needlessly confused, or more frequently – they confidently make mistakes.

So we started with the Scripture and I want to end with the Scripture. Without the Scripture, you really won't benefit from guidance. Lewis Carol is hardly a good guide for life, but one part of the movie in Alice in Wonderland I think is quite apropos. Alice comes to an icy fork in the road. She is frozen in indecision not knowing what to do. She lifts her eyes to heaven looking for guidance. Of course, her eyes do not find God. Instead, they find a Cheshire cat leering at her from his perch in a tree. She asks, "Which way should I go?" "That depends," said the cat. "On what?" she asks. "On your destination. Where are you going?" Alice stammers out, "I don't know." To which the cat says, "then, it doesn't matter." Many Christians feel like Alice in Wonderland. They don't know where to go, what to do, how to do it. And they think that by looking to heaven they can get the answers that they (in their laziness) are unwilling to dig from Scripture. But God will never use guidance as a substitute for Scripture. The Bible says, **The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.** We want the secret guidance of God without the fear of the Lord and without the book of the covenant. But God will not grant it. We gain fear through the Scripture, and as we fear God and completely devote ourselves to following His Scripture, God does usher us into secrets that no one else has. But those secrets are always bookmarked by the Scripture. Let me repeat what George Mueller said. He probably had God's guidance in his prayer life more than anyone I knew, but he insisted that God always ties guidance tightly with His Word. He said,

“I will seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.” Let’s rejoice in God’s guidance. But let’s rejoice even more in the Blueprints He has given to us in His Word. As we trust them and obey them and follow them, God will bless us with the kinds of further guidance that Acts mentions. May it be so. Amen.